THE STORY OF MANIMEKALAI

By

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Preface.

THE *Manimekalai* is one of the five great epics of the Tamils. It is one of the two greatest and earliest, the other being the *Silappadikaram*, the story of Kovalan, the father of Manimekalai, the heroine of this epic, and his wife, Kannaki, and sweet-heart, Madhavi, the mother of Manimekalai. This epic dates from the second century A. D., and tells the story of Manimekalai after the unjust execution of Kovalan for suspected theft by Nedum Cheliyan, the Pandyan King of Madura, and the *sati* of Kannaki after reducing Madura to ashes by her curse. The author of *Manimekalai* was the great poet Sattan of the Sangham age. The author of the *Silappadikaram* was his friend Ilango Adigal, the younger brother of Senguttuvan, the Chera King. Ilango Adigal had become a Buddhist monk by then, but his celebrated work does not show the least trace of prejudice towards other faiths. For a short summary of the story of the *Silappadikaram*, in English, see my book "Kovalan and Kannaki."

Any one reading these two great epics can see that the Tamil writers of those days had a thorough mastery of not only exquisite and chaste Tamil but also of Sanskrit as well, and were as perfectly at home with Aryan culture as with Dravidian culture. The words of St. Appar "I have seen the beauty of Aryan culture, and I have seen the beauty

of Tamilian culture" come forcibly to our minds when we read of the various sects and philosophies of India so graphically described in Manimekalai; of the legends of Tamil Kings like Manunitikanda-cholan, Nedumcheliyan, Kantama, Todittod Sembiyan and Kakandan, side by side with those of Aryan heroes like Parasurama, Rama, Krishna and Udayana; and of Vedic Brahmans and sages, side by side with Buddhist, Jain and Tamil saints. The Chola Kings claimed to belong to the solar dynasty, and the Pandyas and Cheras to the lunar dynasty. The Cholas traced their descent from Sibi, the great apostle of unselfishness who ruled in North India; the Pandyas claimed descent from the Pandavas; and the Cheras from Yadu. Thus, the Tamilians were, practically, only "Southern Aryans," and they called one another, as they do even today, "Ayya," or "Arya" in its Tamil form. The epic itself begins with the 28 days' festival to Indra, the great Vedic deity. The unity of India is ever kept in view. The unit for comparison is always India or Jambudvipa. The chamberlain of Savakanadu tells his King, Punyaraja, about Manimekalai, "In the whole of Jambudvipa, there is no one to match her in beauty, piety and charity. Kaveripumpattinam is described as the granary and centre of charity of Jambudvipa. It is significant that the emperor Asoka also, in his edicts, takes the unit for comparison as Jambudvipa, like the poets Sattan and Ilango Adigal. The culture depicted in these glorious epics is predominantly Tamil, but, in part, also Pan-Indian and cosmopoli-

tan. The garden house of Mavankilli, the Chola King, was built by Tamil architects aided by Maharatta sculptors, Avanti blacksmiths, Yavana carpenters and Magadhan jewellers. There were no less than eighteen different languages spoken by the famine-striken multitudes which flocked to Manimekalai for food at Kanchi. The famine-stricken multitudes of Bengal today cannot be more cosmopolitan.

As may be expected from the fusion of two such wonderful cultures, we get many striking and original ideas. The Kings are unselfish, and work for the welfare of their subjects. *Lokasangraha*, or the welfare of the world, is their ideal, as in the *Gita*. The great enemies of agricultural countries, drought and flood, are tackled, and *permanent* remedies are sought, and not merely *temporary* ones The sublime ideal of co-operation between the gods and men is kept steadily in view. In great crises, an unselfish sage is consulted by the King, and not ministers with axes of their own to grind. Indra gives rain, and the deity of the market-place to punish malefactors, in return for sacrifice represented by the annual festival. When it stops, the deity of the market place ceases to function, and the town itself is destroyed by the sea, as a punishment for the King who concentrates on his private and personal grief and forgets the great national festival.

At the annual festival, the streets and houses and temples are cleaned and decorated, and there

is much merriment and dancing, but there are also sermons by preachers of various sects, and all men are adjured to mix together like brethren, even as the gods mix with men on festive days.

Famine, Pestilence and War, the great enemies of the starving millions of India, have been sized up and described accurately. The heralds proclaiming the Indra festival cry out: "May peace and plenty reign! Death to Hunger and Disease.!" The goddess Tivatilakai tells Manimekalai "Unappeased hunger is a great curse, the greatest curse of humanity. It will destroy good birth, kill nobility, take away all love for learning, make people shameless, destroy beauty, and make self-respecting men beg." The elephant hunger of Kayasandikai and the vivid description of how " the stream of food "went down her capacious throat into her expanding belly" and how it looked as if her hunger would never be satisfied, "like a stream getting lost in a desert" will be appreciated fully only by one who has watched the members of these starving masses eat ravenously when given wholesome, nourishing and palatable food, after years of want and yearning.

The begging bowl of Aputra, got by Manimekalai, reminds us of Andrew Carnegie's "Gifts according to Contributions." It becomes inexhaustible only when some alms are put into it at first, and does not, like the *Akshayapatra* of the *Mahabharata*, give endlessly even without putting

anything into it. The commonsense of the Tamils saved them from too much romance, and kept them fairly realistic.

The same commonsense is seen in the advice to young and beautiful women not to go unescorted, in advising people not to go near cows which have just calved, in describing the antagonism of the Brahmans towards Aputra when he attacked the Vedas and Vedic sacrifices and their successful boycott of him, and in the goddess's telling Manimekalai that no religious leader of her days would teach a woman, and that the only way to learn the secrets of each sect was by changing her sex by a *mantra!*. So too, the other two boons, given to Manimekalai, are dictated by commonsense. The boon enabling her to fly through the air was essential in those days of impassable mountains and rivers and execrable communications. The *mantra* to appease hunger was badly needed in times when there were vast tracts without villages or houses, and there were no concentrated vitamin capsules.

The passions of Lust and Anger are depicted with great insight. Of the five deadly sins, murder, theft, drink and lying are held to be far more easy to avoid than lust. Even a semi-divine being, like a *vidyadhara*, is swayed by it as when he carries away Sutamati. Prince Udayakumara is moved by lust towards Manimekalai as previous Chola princes towards Marudi and Visakai. A

merchant prince is embracing a dancing-girl in foolish bliss at the Indra festival. Another, Saduvan, deserts his faithful wife. Adirai, for a dancing girl. Most horrible of all is the story of the artisan's wife who turned a public woman and had relations with her own son. Manimekalai tells Udayakumara, showing him an old woman: "Great prince, this lady must have been more beautiful than I am now. And, yet, see her now! Her hair is grey, her skin is shrivelled, her colour has faded, her looks are jaded. Such is the fate of the body in every case. So, leave off all desire for the body, and take to higher things." The artisans's wife falls into a well and commits suicide, while her Oedipus son jumps down from the terrace and puts an end to himself. The rake who is sent by the Queen, Udayakumara's mother, to outrage Manimekalai has a remarkable experience. On lasciviously entering her room, one night, to debauch her, he finds a gigantic and ferocious man, jet black in colour, with red rolling eyes, and with protruding teeth like the tusks of a wild boar, instead of the charming maiden he had expected to see, and runs away like one mad, and flees from the Chola country itself in order to escape from facing such dangers again!

The description of love, by Manimekalai, in Uvavanam, how it overwhelms one with the irresistible force of its attraction, and has little to do with respect by the loved one, or even return of the love by him, is graphic.

The ideal of chastity is very high; indeed, it is so high that Marudi, who was a chaste wife by all human standards, considered herself, rightly, as having some element of lust in her because she had evoked lustful thoughts in the prince! Adirai is as great a model of chastity as Kannaki herself. Marriages are made in heaven, and a husband and wife are held to have been husband and wife in all previous births.

A dancing girl is described as a bee going from flower to flower, leaving a flower without a second thought as soon as its honey is exhausted. Her life is shown as involving the taking of liquor, the uttering of lies, the indulgence in promiscuous love, and pre-occupation with filthy thoughts.

Anger is described also very vividly. The blazing and all-consuming anger of the goddesses is seen in Vindhyavasini's catching up Kayasandikai and destroying her when she flew over her temple against the unwritten flying laws of the immortals, and in the goddess Manimekalai's destroying the great city of Kaveripumpattinam when the King failed to celebrate the annual Indra festival. The anger of the queen against Manimekalai, who was indirectly responsible for the death of her son, Udayakumara, is more cunning and subtle. On the advice of that demon of an adviser, Vasantavvai, she tells the King that Manimekalai does not deserve to be in prison,

and should be kept in her own room, and then tries to get her outraged or killed. The attempt to outrage her, in revenge for her refusing to be outraged by Udayakumara and thus making him grow desperate and come by his death, shows profound psychological insight. Rahula's anger at a stranger's seeing him fall at his wife's feet, and his fatal anger at the cook's delaying the breakfast, and spilling it in his nervousness; Vrischika's anger at his twelve-yearly roseapple diet being spoilt by Kayasandikai by unwittingly teading on it; and Kanchana's anger at his supposed wife's ignoring him and talking intimately to Udayakumara are further examples of such insight. A cow's goring Kausika in anger when he went there when it had just calved, and another cow's goring the sacrificial priest to death, when he chased her in order to capture her and sacrifice her, ring true, and show that animal psychology too was not neglected. With all his admiration for non-violence, the poet did not forget that non-violence often generated a cowardly fear at the sight of blood as the one entertained by the Jains at the sight of Kausika's bleeding injuries inflicted by the cow.

Unexpected and refreshing turns of thought are a characteristic of this epic. Indra revenges himself on Aputra, for refusing his boon, by sending down timely rains and causing such bountiful crops that no one in the whole country needed

food from Aputra's bowl, and Aputra got dejected and migrated from the country in disgust and finally committed suicide at not being able to give charity! Manimekalai was kept in prison by the King in order to protect her from the fury of an unreasoning mob grieving for the death of Prince Udayakumara because of the refusal of this dancing girl to yield herself to him. This appearance of "Protective Custody" at such an early age may cause some surprise to those unacquainted with the advance of Law and Justice in those days. The King's statement, when he heard the circumstances of his son's death, that his only regret was that he did not have his son executed under his own orders, and the story of how a predecessor of his, Kakandan, had both his sons executed, one after the other, for attempting to outrage chaste women, show the stern and impartial justice of "the sons of the sun" who kept the Bell of Justice ready for all aggrieved persons to pull. Saduvan's telling the cannibals of the Nicobar islands of the evils of meat, wine, and women is clever. His proof of survival after death, and of the spirit's going to another world, is clasic. He says that a man cries out at the least pain inflicted on him, when alive, and that he does not cry out when his body is burnt after his death, and that this shows that the man has left the body and gone to another world! His prescribing for the cannibals a standard of virtue commensurate with their development and within their reach, is also remarkable. He won the affection of these ferocious cannibals

as effectively as the Christian missionaries did in the South sea islands in later days. The Tamils were great colonisers and civilizers, and the prominent place the East India islands assume in this epic speaks for itself. It is not in vain that their great poetess, Avvai, has said "Seek wealth even by crossing the stormy sea."

Manimekalai's exposition to the queen, of the love of the body and the love of the soul is cogent, clear and convincing. Her going to the Central Jail to feed the prisoners, and her asking of the King, as a boon, the abolition of the Central Jail and the building of almshouses and schools in its place is a precursor of Jail Reform and of the Discharged Prisoners' Society. Udayakumara's oath not to move from the temple till the goddess reveals the whereabouts of Manimekalai is broken by the figure in the painting on the wall exposing the futility of suicide in the cause of unrighteousness. Chitrapati's appeal to Udayakumara to seize Manimekalai, and force her to conform to the caste custom of the dancing girls is strangely disturbing in its implications.

The ideal of penance and asceticism is very high. Father, mother, brother, sister, husband, wife, child and grand-child are all to be left behind by an ascetic, and his life dedicated solely to the welfare of the world.

The epic abounds in striking metaphors and similes. On hearing that Manimekalai had be-

come a nun, Sutamati exclaims "Oh, what a priceless pearl has been thrown into the salty sea!" When the sun sets over Uvavanam and the golden glory is withdrawn, the garden is compared to a young, beautiful and cheerful woman suddenly losing her husband and becoming desolate. Then the moon rises, and is compared to a silver jar pouring out an endless stream of milk in the shape of moonlight.

I have left out most of the philosophical portions, the greatest part of the epic, as they have little story interest though absorbing to philosophers, historians and antiquarians.

The beauties of this epic are many, and a summary of it is very, very inadequate to enable the reader to appreciate its greatness. Still, following the principle of our ancestors, who took a pot of Ganges water to those who could not go to the holy river, I too offer this brief summary to those who are unable to go to the great epic and enjoy it. A new world is coming into being before our very eyes, with a new and rejuvenated India and a new and resurgent *Tamil Nad.* I offer this humble garland of mine at the feet of *Tamil Thai, Bharata Mata* and *Loka Matamahi.*

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THE STORY OF MANIMEKALAI

THE INDRA FESTIVAL INSTITUTED.

THE Chola King, Todittot Sembiyan,* overcame his foes, destroyed the impregnable flying fortresses of the demons, and began to rule in peace. But, there came a great drought and famine, and his beloved people suffered. The king hastily sent for his family *guru,* Agastya, from the Podyil hills,† and begged of him to suggest a remedy. "Revered sir," said he, "Let it be a permanent remedy, a lasting solution, like the Tamil language itself." Agastya then asked him to see Indra, the god of rain, and make him promise to come with the gods and be present at an Indra festival to be held at his capital, Puhar or Kaveripumpattinam,§ every year, for2 8 days. "If he agrees," said the sage, "your kingdom will never have drought or flood so long as the festival is duly celebrated. If the festival is interrupted, for

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* 'Sembiyan' means 'descendant of Sibi' the emperor who gave his flesh to a vulture to save a dove.

† The modern Agastyakutam hills between Tinnevelly and Travancore.

§ A town at the mouth of the Kaveri.

whatever reason, the deity of the market place, which punishes thieves and sinners, will leave the city, and Manimekalai, the deity of the sea, which brings the city its prosperity, will get angry and destroy the city by a tidal wave."

The king went and stood before Indra and made the request. Indra smiled, and said "The words of the sage of the water pot,* the great Agastya, cannot be gainsaid even by the gods. I agree." Thereafter, the Indra festival was an annual fixture in Kaveripumpattinam, and the Chola country became far-famed for its rains and crops, and for the great river Kaveri, the gift of king Kantama and sage Agastya, going like a beautiful bride, to meet her lord, the sea, decked with its never-failing supply of water, resembling pearls and crystals.

THE FESTIVAL COMES ROUND.

The annual Indra festival had come round again. As usual, the great drum was taken out from the temple of the Thunderbolt,† and placed on the royal elephant. Then the king's crier went on the elephant, round the streets, beating the drum and crying out: "May Ponnivalanad,‡ Poompuhar § and the king's vows ever prosper!

* Agastya was, according to legend, born from a water-pot, and is, therefore, called Agastya Kumbhayoni.

† The Thunderbolt is the weapon of Indra.

‡ Chola Country.

§ Kaverippumpattinam.

May our land be blessed with regular rains! Citizens, our king, ministers and councillors have resolved to celebrate the Indra festival, as usual. The thousand-eyed Indra will come to our city tomorrow with all the gods, celestials and sages. So, have *purnakumbham* and gold *palikas* § and statues with lamps ¶ ready everywhere in the streets. Remove the dust from the roads and streets, and spread new sand. Decorate the streets and buildings with plantain and arecanut trees heavy with fruits, and with ferns, creepers and sugarcane. Put strings of pearls from pillar to pillar. Hang up flags, buntings and festoons over doorways and gate-ways. Tidy up the temples, from the Siva temple to those of the deities of the public square and bazaar. Let the men of God, versed in the scriptures, assemble in halls, *mantapams* and platforms, and explain them to the masses. As even gods and men mingle freely, at this season, on the sand-dunes, at the bathing ghats, and in the islets and river gardens, those who are enemies should cast off their enmity and become friends, and celebrate this joyous festival in perfect camaraderie. May peace and plenty reign! Death to hunger and disease!". The chief elephant was followed by other elephants, and by groups of cavalry, chariots and infantry. Crowds of citizens and urchins also followed, vociferously repeating the proclamation.

§ Offerings of water, mango-leaves, and sprouting plants, to please the gods.

¶ To light up the streets, and to drive away the demons.

MADHAVI AND MANIMEKALAI REFUSE TO TAKE PART.

The festival began, the next day, with its customary splendour. But Madhavi and Manimekalai had heard that morning the tragic news of the killing of Kovalan at Madura, on an unjust charge of theft, and of Kannaki's death by *sati*. They became sad beyond endurance, gifted away all their properties to the poor, and entered a Buddhist convent. They did not, therefore, go to the assembly hall, and delight the citizens with their dancing and singing, as was their custom at the Indra festivals.

Hearing the bitter complaints of the citizens regarding this omission, Madhavi's mother, Chitrapati, became indignant. She called Vasantamala, the dear friend of Madhavi, and said to her, "Go to Madhavi and Manimekalai, and tell them that, since they have not come as usual to the Indra festival, the citizens are very much disappointed. Tell Madhavi, from me, that it is not meet that they should leave off their caste custom, and take to the alien institution of nuns, and that they should, therefore, both come here immediately, and that she has no right to ruin Manimekalai's career. Somehow, you should bring them here."

Vasantamala went at once to the convent, and became filled with sadness on seeing Madhavi and Manimekalai in their ascetic robes. She told them

what Chitrapati had told her. On hearing it, Madhavi said "You have said all this, Oh Vasantamala, because of your ignorance of Manimekalai's nature. The daughter of Kovalan, the step-daughter of Kannaki, that incarnation of chastity, is only doing the proper thing by abandoning a life of shame. The life of a dancing girl is not for one like her. I too, unable to bear the grief of the loss of my beloved, went and wept before the great Buddhist teacher, Aravana Adigal. He said to me 'To see one lead a life of shame causes great grief. But to see one take to a life of renunciation causes great joy. Attachment to vain pleasures is the cause of the first. Detachment from them is the cause of the second.' He also taught me the four great truths, and made me a nun. If I were a wedded wife, I would have comitted *sati*, like Kannaki, or worn widow's weeds. I cannot come and dance any more. Tell this to Chitrapati and appease her anger and sorrow." Vasantamala, with a mind as disturbed as that of one who has seen priceless gems thrown into the salty sea, went and told Chitrapati all this.

MANIMEKALAI GOES TO UVAVANAM.

Manimekalai went on shedding tears, all day long, for the sad fate of her father, Kovalan, and her step-mother, Kannaki. Those tears wetted the fragrant flower garland she had in her hand for worship. Madhavi saw this, wiped off her tears, consoled her with sweet words, and said to her

"Since your tears have fallen on the garland, it cannot be offered for the evening worship. Go to the garden, and bring other flowers."

Manimekalai was about to start for the flower garden. Then, her Brahmin nun friend, Sutamati, said to her "A beautiful young woman, like you, should not go alone to the flower garden late in the evening. Many evil things may happen. Hear what I suffered by going alone. I am the daughter of a celebrated Brahmin, Kausika, of the famous city of Champa, in Northern India. One day, without thought or fear, I went to a flower garden there, and was gathering flowers. Then Maruthavega,* a *Vidyadhara,*† who was on his way to see the Indra festival here, entertained a sudden passion for me, swooped on me, and took me across the sky. He kept me for some time, and then brought and left me here. Girls come to grief like this if they go alone. So, I shall also accompany you. Ilavanthikai cholai ‡ being the residence of the royal family, we should not go there. Uyyanavanam ‡ can only be entered by the gods, and not by mere human beings like us. Demons guard the flowers there, and even bees dare not approach that garden. Kaverivanam ‡ and Sampadivanam ‡ are guarded by gods. So, we should not go there. There is, however, a garden called Uvavanam where, by the grace of the all-merciful and all-loving god,

* "Swift as the wind"

† A Semi-divine being.

‡ Names of various gardens in the city.

there are many trees with beautiful flowers. That garden is the abode of many ascetics of rigid vows. So there is no possibility of our coming to any evil by going there. In the middle of that garden, there is a beautiful sound-proof crystal pavilion. People in there can only be seen, and not heard. Inside it there is a lotus pedestal of the Buddha, set with rubies. Buds put on it in worship open of themselves. Full-blown flowers offered on it remain fresh and unfading. No bees or beetles will dare to touch flowers put on it. That pedestal has many miraculous virtues. It was built by the great architect Maya. Its splendour cannot be described. It can be realised only by seeing it. If we go to that garden, we can bring many fragrant flowers." So saying, she started for that garden with Manimekalai.

The two went along the streets where the festival was still in full swing. They heard, on the way, a drunkard telling an emaciated man, who had taken a vow to fast, "My good man, if you drink toddy, your thin body will become plump and handsome, and a joy to look at. Your mind, now suffering in the withered body, will also cast off its sadness and pain, and attain untold joy. So, take a drink of toddy." There were crowds of people in the streets. There were many gazing at the beautiful and life-like paintings on the walls of the houses. On seeing Manimekalai, all of them crowded round her, and said: "Madhavi, who has consigned this peerless beauty to a life of asceti-

cism, is, indeed, a wretch. We can't imagine the grief the swans of the flower garden will suffer on seeing the gait of this queen among women outrivalling theirs." Manimekalai and Sutamati heard all this, and went into the Uvavanam.

UDAYAKUMARA TOO GOES THERE.

On entering the garden, they saw innumerable trees and flowers of all kinds, and channels with clear water, running pure, like the minds of the great ones. The creepers, shrubs, ferns and palms were also as beautiful as they were numerous. When they were watching all this beauty, and wandering about the garden in joy, they heard a big hubbub. The king's crown elephant, Kalavegam,* had got out of control, and run amok in the town, causing panic among the people. On hearing the hubbub, the crown Prince, Udayakumara, went after it with a group of trained mahouts, and brought it under control, just outside the Uvavanam. When returning to the palace, in his chariot, through Dancing Girl Avenue, he saw a merchant prince, Ettikumara, holding his *Vina* in one hand, and with his other arm round a beautiful dancing girl, standing astounded like a statue. On questioning him, he heard that he was flabbergasted at seeing Manimekalai, the greatest beauty of the day, in a nun's robes, go past into the Uvavanam with Sutamati, and on remembering the woes of Kovalan and Kannaki.

* "Fleet as time".

Udayakumara was secretly enamoured of Manimekalai. "I shall go at once and bring her" he said to Ettikumara, and turned his chariot back, and went into the Uvavanam. The noise of his chariot was heard by Manimekalai. She became frightened. She called Sutamati and said to her "Don't you hear the sound of a chariot? It seems to me to be the sound of Udayakumara's fast chariot. I have heard Chitrapati tell Madhavi that he is greatly enamoured of me. Suggest some device by which I can escape from him." Sutamati asked her to get inside the crystal pavilion and bolt the door. She herself stood a little distance away, and watched.

Udayakumara, on going into the garden, saw Sutamati standing alone. He asked her "Why are you standing alone in this lonely place? I heard that you came here with Manimekalai. Where is she? Has she recovered her smiles? It is a good thing that she has left that gloomy convent and come to this pleasure garden". Sutamati was at first afraid to reply to the prince. But, finally, she mustered up courage, and said to him "Oh descendant of the great Karikala, who, in early childhood, decided the disputes of two men, disguised as an old man, and found out the truth from their own words, you need not be taught your royal duty by a girl like me. Still, I shall say this much. Listen. The body is the result of our previous *Karma*.* It is the seat of evil.

* Actions.

Remove the garments, ornaments, and outside veneer from any human being, and the smell of flesh will come. The savage in us is always there. The body is the abode of pain. The poisonous cobras of anger and hatred lurk in it. It contains within it present suffering, the helplessness to get out of it, and bitter, resultant, sorrow. Desire is the root of all evil. Desist, therefore, from your desire for Manimekalai."

But, Udayakumara was not listening. He had seen the fascinating form of Manimekalai within the crystal chamber, and was looking at her like one enchanted. He went round the crystal wall feeling for the door, but could not find it. "Tell me how to enter this pavilion" he asked Sutamati, "I won't" said she. "She is destined for a life of virtue. Lust will not take possession of her. Go away in peace. She may even curse you, if you persist."

"Oh, stop this talk!" said the prince. "I shall somehow make her my own. She is only a dancing girl, having no claims to virtue or penance or high caste".

"You never will" said she.

"Love will find out a way" he replied, "even as the *Vidyadhara's* love found out a way in your case. By the way, the *Vidyadhara* left you in a Jain nunnery here. How did you get out of it, and come here now with Manimekalai?"

SUTAMATI'S STORY.

"My father, Kausika, went from place to place in search of me, and reached this town, and saw me in the nunnery." said Sutamati. "His heart would not allow him to be separated from me his only child, whom he had brought up affectionately since the death of my mother when I was a babe. So, he began living here as a beggar, visiting me every day after his daily rounds. One day, he went near a cow which had just delivered a calf. Thinking that he was after its calf, the animal ran at him, gored him, and tore open his stomach. Pressing his entrails with his hand, he came to the Jain nunnery where I was, and prayed for admission and treatment there. The nuns, horrified at the sight of the blood and the entrails, refused to let him in, but allowed me to go away with him. A Buddhist monk called Sanghadharma took pity on us, and admitted us to a Buddhist monastery, and told us about the glory of the Buddha who conquered all desire and worked for the salvation of the entire humanity. My father died greatly consoled. I am spending my days since then in recounting the Buddha's deeds and words. Desist, oh prince, from your desire for Manimekalai."

"Never!" said Udayakumara, "I shall gain that darling of my heart through the good offices of the palace dancer, Chitrapati," and he returned to the palace in his chariot.

Manimekalai opened the door, and came out of the pavilion, casting wistful eyes on the departing chariot. "Oh Sutamati" said she, "I feel strangely drawn towards him. My heart runs after him, though this is the first time I see him. He has spoken of me as a woman of no virtue, and as not entitled to perform penance, and as a person who can be bought for a price. Instead of being angry with him for that, why does my heart yearn for him? Is this the nature of what is called Love? If so, may that love be wiped out of my heart!"

Then, the shades of evening fell on the garden which changed its merry aspect into a sad one, like a young, beautiful and cheerful woman suddenly losing her husband and becoming desolate. But, soon, the moon appeared in the sky, like a silver jar, and flooded the garden with moonlight as if it was pouring out an endless stream of milk.

THE GODDESS MANIMEKALAI COMES.

The goddess Manimekalai, who had saved one of Kovalan's sea-faring ancestors, and whose name had, in consequence, been given to our heroine, descended to the garden and worshipped the Buddha as the Knowing One, the pure One, the exalted One, the conqueror of desire, and the destroyer of evil conduct. Then she saw Sutamati and Manimekalai, and asked them why they were

standing perplexed there. They told the goddess everything. The goddess said that Udayakumara had not used violence against Manimekalai there, because the garden was a grove where holy men were engaged in penance, but that he would use violence on her if she went out of the garden to the public highways of the town. She advised the two to spend the night in *Chakravalakottam*,† called also *Sudukattukottam*,‡ where many holy ones were performing penances of various kinds. "Life ends in death" said the goddess, "whether the corpse is thereafter burnt or buried, or put in big mud pots, or eaten by wild beasts or birds. No mortal can escape death."

HER INSTRUCTIONS TO SUTAMATI.

Sutamati soon fell asleep. The goddess Manimekalai then charmed Manimekalai to sleep, and carried her by air to Manipallavam, an island a hundred and fifty miles to the south, and returned to Puhar, leaving her there. Then, she went to Udayakumara, who was passing a restless night, dreaming of capturing Manimekalai by force the next morning, and told him in a dream "A prince should not be unrighteous. Cast off all desire for Manimekalai". She appeared then to Sutamati in a dream, and told her about her taking Manimekalai to Manipallavam in order to enable her to get a knowledge of the previous birth of herself

† The temple of the horizon of life.

‡ The temple of the burning ghat.

and Sutamati, and promised that she would return, and that Sutamati would recognise her, though she would look very different from what she was. She asked her to tell Madhavi that Manimekalai would become a pure Buddhist nun, and to remind her of her telling her, in a dream, when she had just conceived Manimekalai "You will become the mother of a child who will defeat the God of Passion completely, and take to a life of holy penance."

Sutamati woke up, trembling, and was much distressed at the separation from Manimekalai. She entered *Chakravalakottam* by one of its gates, and retired to a corner of that temple. A statue on a pillar in front of her told her that she had been Virai in her previous birth and that Madhavi and Manimekalai had been her elder and younger sisters, Tarai and Lakshmi, in that birth. Sutamati spent the rest of the night in fear and trembling. In the morning, she went to Madhavi and told her everything. Madhavi was plunged in sorrow like a serpent which has lost its crest jewel. Sutamati also remained incapable of action, like a corpse, because of her separation from Manimekalai.

MANIMEKALAI AT MANIPALLAVAM.

Manimekalai, meanwhile, woke up from sleep at Manipallavam. The whole place was as strange and unfamiliar to her as the next world to a de-

parted soul. She ran from the sea to the sand-dunes, crying out for Sutamati, thinking, that this might be a strange portion of the Uvavanam garden, and that her comrade must have hidden somewhere in the vicinity, just to cause fright to her in joke. Finally, she realised that Sutamati was not there. She cried out frantically; "Oh father, father, you met your death by unjust violence! Mother, mother Kannaki, you burnt yourself to death in frantic grief! Am I destined to die in exile in this lonely island?"

She then sighted a pedestal of the Buddha which, owing to the Buddha's having preached a sermon sitting on it, in order to pacify two Naga princes, who were closely related to each other and were fighting bitterly for the possession of the island, had the miraculous power of making people remember their past births. She recollected then that she was, in her previous birth, Lakshmi, queen of Rahula, that she went with her husband, to the banks of the *Kayamkarai* * river in the Avanti country, to listen to the soul-stirring discourse of the Buddha who was preaching to king Hastipati of Eastern Gandhara, who had fled thither with his queens and people, on receiving a warning from him about a terrible earthquake which would destroy his capital, Idavayam, and the country for 400 miles around, which earthquake had actually occurred that day. The Buddha had then told her

* The modern Kshipra river near Ujjain, the capital of Avanti.

that her husband, Rahula, would die on the sixteenth day from then by the bite of a terribly venomous serpent, whose very sight was poisonous enough to kill, and that she would be reborn in Puhar, and would then be in great danger when the goddess Manimekalai would remove her to Manipallavam where she would remember her past birth by the seat of the Buddha, and where the goddess Manimekalai would tell her about her husband's re-birth also.

Manimekalai remained weeping for the advent of the goddesss Manimekalai, anxious to know where her husband was re-born. Soon, the goddess came hurtling through the air, worshipped the Buddha seat, and then told Manimekalai : "Your husband Rahula has been re-born as Udayakumara."

"Ah" said Manimekalai, "That explains his pursuing me with his love, and my being attracted by him".

"Yes. You and he had a love quarrel, in your previous birth, and he fell at your feet, you maintaining a pose of indifference. Then you saw, a great Buddhist *charana,** Sakkara, come flying through the air. You at once felt ashamed of having made your husband lie prostrate at your feet, and quickly rose up, and saluted the *charana*. Your husband was angry, and asked you 'Who is

* A sage, saint and preacher.

that man whom you are saluting?' You shut his mouth with your hand, saying 'He deserves worship at your hands, and not this rude remark.' You then apologised to the *charana*, and prayed of him to accept your hospitality. He agreed, You will reap the merit of thus feeding that great soul by getting a miraculous bowl."

THE GODDESS'S THREE BOONS.

Then the goddess taught Manimekalai three *mantras*.† One would enable her to fly through the air, another to assume any form at will, and a third to appease her hunger by wishing to do so. She told her "I have brought you here in order to escape from Udayakumara's importunities. You are meant in this life to become a holy Buddhist nun who would fully master the Buddha's teachings. You must first of all master the innermost truths of the other sects and creeds. They will not teach you the truths if you go as a woman. Hence the *mantra* enabling you to change your form. You will have to go to distant lands to master the various truths, and slow travel wastes time. Hence the *mantra* enabling you to fly through the air. Lack of proper food at proper times is one of the greatest hindrances to concentration and studies. Hence the *mantra* to appease your hunger."

THE MAGIC BOWL OF APUTRA.

With this, the goddess disappeared. Manimekalai walked about in the island for some time

† Sacred spells.

wondering at what had occurred. Then the goddess Tivatilakai * met her, and told her about *Amrita Surabhi,* † the magic begging bowl of Aputra, which would come out of the pond opposite the Buddha seat, full of lotuses and water lilies, that day, which was the Buddha's birth-day. "Food put into it will become inexhaustible. You are destined to get that bowl and appease hunger" said she. "Unappeased Hunger is a great curse, the greatest enemy of humanity. It will destroy good birth, kill nobility, take away all love for learning, make people shameless, destroy beauty, and make self-respecting men beg. The sage Visvamitra once ate the flesh of a dog, in order to appease his hunger in a famine, and shamed Indra, by that terrible act, into sending down the rains. Food given to the hungry is true charity. Food given to the well-to-do is misplaced charity. Come, take the bowl, which has become yours by your hospitality to Sakkara, and go back to Kaveripattinam and other places, and feed the hungry."

Manimekalai went with Tivatilakai to the pond, found the *Amrita Surabhi* bowl come out of it to the surface, and took it with wonder and gratitude.

"What is its history?" she asked Tivatilakai.

"Aravana Adigal will tell you all about it" said Tivatilakai. "Now, go."

* "Dvipa Tilaka" or "The crest-jewel of the island."
† "Endless nectar."

Manimekalai saluted the goddess, bade farewell to her, and flew back to Kaveripattinam with the aid of the *mantra*. She met her mother and Sutamati, and told them about the previous birth of herself and Udayakumara, to their great wonder. Then they went to Aravana Adigal.

APUTRA'S STORY.

The great sage said to Manimekalai: "This marvellous bowl belonged once to Aputra. He was the son of a Brahman lady, Sali, the wife of Abhanjika, a Brahman of Benares, by adultery. Sali went on a pilgrimage to Kanya Kumari,‡ in order to get rid of her sin by bathing in the holy waters there, where the three oceans meet. A day's march from Korkai, the Pandyan capital, she delivered a son, and abandoned him in a lonely plantain garden. A cow went to the spot, on hearing the cry of the child, and licked the child, and gave it milk, A childless Brahman of an adjoining village, Vayanangode, called Ilambhuti, passed that way. along with his wife, found the child, and gave it to his wife. They brought the child up as their own, and educated him properly, and invested him with the holy thread.

One day, a Brahman of that village wanted to sacrifice a cow in what is known as a *Gomedhayaga*. He had all the preliminary cerémonies done, and had the cow tied up outside his house,

‡ Cape Comorin, the Land's End of India.

ready for the grand sacrifice the next morning. Aputra was a great opponent of cow-sacrifice, and resolved to prevent this one. In the night, he cut the rope by which the cow was tied, and took the cow away. But, shortly after he had left, the priest came to see the cow, and found it missing. He raised a hue and cry. A crowd of Brahmans assembled. They saw the footprints of the cow and Aputra, and followed them, and, finally, caught Aputra, with the cow. They began belabouring Aputra. The priest tried to seize the cow, but it gored him on his belly, and caused his omentum to protrude. Pressing it with his hands, he shouted for vengeance. The Brahmans beat Aputra mercilessly. They asked him whether he was the son of a cow that he should rescue it. He retorted that a poor and noble animal like the cow, which was the foster-mother of humanity, should not be sacrificed. They quoted the Vedas in support. Then he condemned the Vedas for approving of such a sacrifice. They were all horrified. One of them, who knew about Sali and the abandonment of Aputra by her, said 'No wonder he is opposed to the Vedas', and proclaimed the truth about his parentage and birth. Then Ilambhuti disclaimed him, and he was driven out of the village. He could not get any alms anywhere in that locality. So he went to Madura where he used to sleep in the front courtyard of the Sarasvati temple and go out and beg in the streets and feed the deaf, the dumb, the maimed,

the diseased and the hungry with the proceeds first before he himself ate. One day, when asleep, some hungry people woke him up and asked him for food. He had nothing with him. He begged of the goddess Sarasvati, and she gave him this bowl promising that any alms put into it would feed any number of people. He went out with it and got some alms and fed all the hungry people. Daily he began feeding thousands after getting some alms in that bowl from some one or other. His fame spread on earth and in the heavens. Indra was pleased with him, and paid him a visit, in the guise of an old Brahman, and said to him 'Ask for any boon you like.' Aputra laughed long and loud, and said 'What boon do I want from you, oh god? I have this bowl, and my poor to feed, and these are enough for me.' Indra was offended and, in revenge, sent such plentiful rains to that country that no one there ever wanted food, and, so, no poor man was available for Aputra to feed from his bowl. Aputra got dejected, and set out in a ship for Savakanadu* where he heard from travellers that there was a famine and that many people had died. But, at Manipallavam, where the ship halted and the passengers alighted, he missed the ship, which sailed before the scheduled time, as there was a favourable wind. He became heart-broken at being left alone in that desolate place, and fasted unto death, leaving his bowl in that lotus pond with the cow's

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* Sumatra.

mouth eddy, praying that it might come into the hands of some person eager to feed the poor. You have got it now. Go and feed the poor people in the streets, after getting some alms first in that bowl from some worthy person."

MANIMEKALAI RETURNS TO PUHAR.

Manimekalai bowed to Aravana Adigal, and went into the streets of Puhar with her begging bowl. A motley crowd followed her, like the crowd which had followed Yaugandharayana when he went to Ujjain disguised as a man with a disgusting disease, in order to rescue Udayana* who had been thrown into prison by Pradyota. They were astonished to see the beloved of the Crown Prince go out as a mendicant with a bowl. Kayasandikai was among that crowd. She said to Manimekalai "I am suffering from 'elephant hunger', a disease with unappeasable hunger as its main symptom, for the last twelve years. Can this bowl give enough food to satisfy my hunger too?"

"Undoubtedly" said Manimekalai "The bowl will never tire of giving. It is only your hand which will tire of receiving."

"Then, I have hopes of getting rid of this horrible disease which has blasted my life" said Kayasandikai. "Pray be quick about it."

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* Udayana was the king of Vatsa. Yaugandharayana was his prime minister. See "Pratijnayaugandharayana" in my 'Two Plays of Bhasa."

"I want to take the first alms from the best among the chaste women of this locality" said Manimekalai.

SADUVAN AND ADIRAI.

"That is quite easy for me to tell you" said Kayasandikai. "You see the house opposite. There lives, now, with her husband, in ideal happiness, Adirai, the best among the chaste women of this locality. Her husband, Saduvan, was once a merchant prince. He took a fancy for a dancing girl, and spent all his wealth on her. When his wealth was gone, the dancing girl shut her doors on him, and took to another rich lover. When the chagrined, crushed Saduvan returned home, he found no change in his wife. She did not convey by word or deed, that her love for him had diminished to the least extent. To retrieve his fortunes, and to do his duty by his wife, Saduvan went abroad in a trading vessel. His ship was wrecked on the return journey. A few escaped and came here and reported the news. All believed that the remaining passengers were lost. Adirai wanted to commit *sati*, but the flames would not touch her, and a voice said to her 'Get down from the pyre, you chaste woman. Your husband is not dead. He will return'. And so he did. He had held on to a plank and had been washed ashore on one of the Naga islands. There, the Nagas, who are cannibals, went eagerly to eat him up. But he knew the langauage of the Nagas, and

asked them to kill him, if they liked, but not to eat him, as such a sin would never be forgiven by God. The Naga chief then s p a r e d his life, and gave him some chickens to eat, some liquor to drink, and a young and beautiful dancing girl as his mate. He refused all, saying "Why should I take the lives of these chickens in order to keep my life going for a second? Why should I take drink and get more intoxicated when I am not sober enough, even without it, to control my lust, greed and anger? Why should I want this dancing girl when I have a loving wife and have learnt the nature of dancing girls? Give me some rice and vegetables for food, some pure water for drink, and some wise men for companions.' The Chief was very pleased, gave him those things, and asked him 'Tell us some way of improving without giving up meat-eating, and drinking and the company of these young women'. Saduvan told him "Don't eat men, and don't kill ship-wrecked persons, but help them to the best of your ability. These things you can do easily, and are the first steps in the ladder leading the soul to God, after death'. 'What proof is there that anything survives death ?' asked the chief. 'When alive, we feel and experience all kinds of pains and pleasures. When dead, we cease to do so, and do not feel even our bodies being burnt. Is it not obvious that the person who was experiencing, what I call the soul, has left? And, is it not obvious that it must have gone somewhere else, what I call the other world? So, let

our actions be calculated to bring about our welfare not only in this world but in the other world also' said Saduvan. This went home. The Chief and his men swore to abide by this advice. Then Chandradatta's fleet was sighted. It was avoiding the notorious island. But Saduvan signalled to it, that the islanders were now friendly, and made Chandradatta call at the main port. Then the Chief put Saduvan on board with gold, sandalwood, aloes, and fine silks and cottons, from the accumulated loot of hundreds of ships wrecked off that coast, and Saduvan reached Kaveripattinam safe and rich. He fell at his wife's feet, and told her 'Oh chastest among women, your virtues are responsible for saving me from a horrible death.' He is now living happily with her. Come along, let us go to Adirai's house"

Manimekalai went to the house and said "Lady of the house, come and give alms."

Adirai came out with a smiling face, circumambulated round Manimekalai, and filled her bowl with the finest food, saying: "May this satisfy your hunger and that of all those who come to feed from this bowl!" Manimekalai fed the numerous persons around her from the bowl.

KAYASANDIKAI'S HUNGER SATISFIED.

Kayasandikai said to her "Will this bowl satisfy my hunger too? My hunger is so great that though I take as much food as the hills of

stone brought by the army of monkeys to enable Rama, the *avatar** of Vishnu, to construct the causeway across the sea, it is not satisfied."

"Stretch forth your hands" said Manimekalai. "This bowl will never fail."

Kayasandikai stretched forth her hands. A continuous stream of food went from the bowl into her hands, and disappeared down her capacious throat, into her expanding belly. At first, it looked as if her hunger would never be satisfied, as if the stream was getting lost in a desert. But, finally, Kayasandikai exclaimed "Enough! Enough! My hunger is appeased! My curse has ended!"

"What curse?" asked Manimekalai. "Who are you, and how did you contract this disease?"

HER STORY.

"I am Kayasandikai, the wife of a *Vidyadhara* called Kanchana from Kanchanapura in Mount Kailasa in the far north. We were going to the Podiyil Hills, at the source of the *Tamraparni*,† on a picinic. On the way, when I was having a love quarrel with my husband, on the banks of a lovely forest stream, I unwarily trod on, and spoilt, a fine rose-apple, as big as a palm fruit, kept on a teak leaf by an old Brahman sage called

* An incarnation.

† A river in Tinnevelly, in the far south

Vrischika who had gone into the stream to bathe, preparatory to breaking his twelve years' fast with this divine fruit which could be got only once in twelve years. A second after my misadventure, Vrischika came to the spot, was desolate at seeing his fruit crushed and rendered useless, and cursed me as follows: 'May you, who walked about, when you knew to fly, and did this clumsy act, forget the art of flying for twelve years! And, may you, who have made me lose my twelve-yearly meal, never have your hunger appeased for twelve years from now!' Then he left. I found hunger gnawing at me. I could not also rise into the air and fly. My husband took pity on me, and brought me heaps and heaps of fruits and roots from all over the forest. But, my hunger was unappeased. He then advised me to come and settle down in this great city of Puhar, by the mighty Kaveri, saying to me 'That is the granary of the South. It is the city in all Jambudvipa* noted for its choultries and charities. There, if anywhere, you can get food to keep your hunger down. I too can see you every year there, at the Indra festival.' I came here accordingly, and have been here, feeding on charity, and trying to keep my hunger down, for the last twelve years. Now, my curse is over. Thanks to this bowl and you, I am no longer hungry. I also feel my limbs aching to fly. That faculty too must have returned. Good-bye, good lady. I must fly to

* India.

Kanchanapura and meet my dear, dear husband. Go to the rest-house inside Chakravalakottam, where the great ones are doing penance in order to destroy suffering in the world. Feed those who suffer from hunger and resort there for food."

Kayasandikai then flew away northward to Kanchanapura. Manimekalai went to the rest-house indicated, circumambulated it thrice, and worshipped the guardian goddess of the city, in thought, word and deed. She then went to the hall where the hungry and the destitute were, and her advent there, with the bowl, was as welcome as that of a shower of rain in a parched-up country. She went on giving food from the bowl to the innumerable destitutes there, and hope and joy were seen once more on faces which had not reflected them for years.

Chitrapati Tempts the Prince.

Manimekalai continued to remain in the rest-house dressed as a nun, distributing alms to the poor. Chitrapati, her grand-mother, heard of this, and her anger knew no bounds. Calling for a meeting of dancing-girls, she said to them " What a shame is this ! A girl born in our community, and overflowing with beauty and charm, to put on a nun's robes and waste her glorious youth in doing charity like a Brahman widow ! Fie on her ! We, dancing girls, are like bees going from flower to flower, leaving a flower without a second

thought, as soon as its honey is exhausted. We are like lutes which pass from hand to hand when the owners die or become bankrupt. I will make this girl leave her nun's robes and seat herself on Udayakumara's car as his mistress. He loves her, and will give her any amount of wealth. If I fail to do this, you may put seven burnt bricks on my head, take me round the Palace Dance Hall, in ignominious procession, and outcast me."

She then went to the palace, interviewed Udayakumara, told him where Manimekalai was, and asked him to go to the rest-house and take her as his mistress, saying that, under the rules of the community, she could give her away. Udayakumara told her that a goddess had warned him, in a dream the previous night, to leave Manimekalai alone, lest he should come to grief. Chitrapati laughed, and said "Don't you believe in such dreams, my prince! Even gods are moved by beauty. Did not Indra approach Ahalya? Did not Agni consort with the wives of the sages? Did not Sasanka seduce Tara? None but the brave deserve the fair! And you kings ought to see that dancing-girls do not abandon their duties."

UDAYAKUMARA AND MANIMEKALAI.

Encouraged by her, Udayakumara went to the rest-house and saw Manimekalai distributing food there. He asked her "Why have you adopted these ascetic robes?"

Manimekalai made a profound obeisance to him, both as the Crown Prince, and as her husband in her previous birth, and told him 'Birth, growth and decay, disease and death, oh prince, are the lot of the body. So, for the sake of the soul, I have taken these robes, and dedicated my life to religion and charity."

Seeing him looking at her only with growing admiration and love, she at once deemed it fit to change her form, in order to escape from his importunities. She asked to be excused for a moment, went into the temple of Champapati, uttered the *mantra* taught to her by the goddess, changed into the form of Kayasandikai, and came out taking the begging bowl with her.

Udayakumara was perplexed. Where had Manimekalai, the beloved of his heart, gone? He rushed into the temple, prostrated before the idol of Champapati, and said "Oh Goddess, tell me where Manimekalai has gone, leaving her begging bowl with Kayasandikai. I shall not leave this place till you tell me." A figure in a painting by his side said to him. "You are rash in making such a vow. It will come to nought."

Udayakumara was impressed by this voice, which confirmed so strangely the warning of the goddess in the dream. So, he rose, and went back to the palace, resolving to do nothing rash but to find out the truth about Manimekalai.

Manimekalai retained her form of Kayasandikai, seeing in it the one sure protection against Udayakumara's importunities. She went all round the city with her bowl, feeding the poor everywhere,

PRISON PULLED DOWN.

Finally, she went, one day, to the chief prison, and fed the numerous half-starved and hungry prisoners there. The Superintendent, wardens and guards were astonished at her ability to feed so many from a single bowl, and resolved to report the marvel to the king.

Mavankilli, the king, visited the pleasure gardens along with his wife, Siritti, descended from the emperor Mahabali. He pointed out to his queen two peacocks and a swan, dancing together in the gardens, and compared them to Krishna, Subhadra and Balarama. He compared also a bamboo and a *Kadamba* tree, standing side by side there, to Krishna and Balarama. He and Siritti finished their visit to the gardens, and entered the marvellously beautiful garden palace built with the skill of the Tamil architect, the Mahratta sculptor, the Avanti blacksmith, the Yavana carpenter, and the Magadhan jeweller. It had pillars of corals, pendants of pearls, and a canopy of gold.

The king and queen were reclining on a magnificent couch in the hall of this wonderful buil-

ding when the Jail Superintendent entered and said that a woman called Kayasandikai, suffering from 'elephant-hunger' till recently, had gone to the prison and fed all the prisoners from a bowl whose contents appeared to be inexhaustible. The king at once sent for Manimekalai, who was disguised as Kayasandikai, and questoned her.

She said "May the rains never fail! May the earth always yield abundant crops! May the king never do evil! I am the daughter of a *Vidyadhara,* and have been wandering about the city in disguise. A goddess gave me this marvellous bowl which cures even 'elephant-hunger'. I want to eradicate hunger from this country."

"Capital!" said the king. "I too am interested in it. Ask for any boon you like, for this great service, and I shall grant it."

"Pull down that horrible prison of yours, and build, in its place, almshouses for the poor" said Manimekalai.

"All right" said the king, and gave orders accordingly. Soon, the gloomy prison was a forgotten memory, and in its place stood delightful almshouses resounding with hymns and prayers. There was a pedestal for the Buddha, residential rooms for students, and kitchens and dining halls galore. Manimekalai distributed food daily in those dining halls, and lived in Chakravalakottam.

UDAYAKUMARA AGAIN.

Udayakumara went to Chakravalakottam and began to entertain a deep-rooted suspicion that Manimekalai had assumed the form of Kayasandikai, Just as he entered the hall where she was, Kanchana, who had been searching for Kayasandikai all over the town, as her period of curse was over and yet she had not returned to him, went there. On seeing Manimekalai in her disguise, he mistook her for Kayasandikai, and went to embrace her with warmth, crying out: "So, some god, out of pity, has given you this feeding bowl, my darling!" He was astonished to see no reciprocating warmth on her side. She edged away from him, and began talking familiarly and intimately to Udayakumara who had come in just then. Pointing out an old woman there, to him, she said to him "Great prince, this lady must have been very beautiful once, much more beautiful than I am now. And, yet, see her now! Her hair is gray, her skin is shrivelled, her colour has faded, her looks are jaded. Such is the fate of the body in every case. So, leave off all desire for the body, and take to higher things" Udayakumara was not convinced, and his eyes showed unmistakable love for her. He felt confirmed in his belief that this was only Manimekalai in disguise. As for Kanchana, he was wroth at Kayasandikai's indifference to him and her familiarity with Udayakumara whom he considered to be making love to her and to have stolen her affections from him.

Embarrassed by Kanchana's presence, Udayakumara resolved to visit Manimekalai at night, in secret, and left, after telling her "I shall come to you later on, and have a talk with you."

KANCHANA KILLS UDAYAKUMARA.

Kanchana guessed that the prince would come secretly in the night to visit Kayasandikai. So, he lay in wait for him, that night, with his sword specially sharpened.

Udayakumara went there at midnight, prompted by his great love for Manimekalai. Kanchana sprang on him suddenly and cut him into two with his sword. Then he went to drag the horrified Manimekalai by the arm, mistaking her for Kayasandikai, shouting out "Quick! Let us fly back to Kanchanapura!" But the divine statue in the pillar said to him "Approach her not, oh Kanchana! This is not your wife Kayasandikai. She is Manimekalai who has assumed your wife's disguise in order to escape from the importunities of Udayakumara who had become infatuated with her. You wife, Kayasandikai, in her eagerness to meet you, forgot the rules of flying in this country, and flew over the temple of the goddess Kali, in her form as Vindhyavasini, at the gate of the Deccan, and was promptly caught up by the death ray sent out by the dread goddess, and destroyed, as a punishment for this insult. You have killed this prince unjustly. But it is his *karma,* and you are only an instrument."

Kanchana heard the story, in wonder and sorrow, and then left for Kailasa, in a sad and penitent mood.

Manimekalai had woke up on hearing the sound of Kanchana's sword cutting the prince in two. She saw Kanchana then rush towards her, and heard the words of the statue to him, and saw Kanchana go away.

THE GOD OF THE STATUE SPEAKS.

Flabbergasted at the turn events had taken, she assumed her own real form, and wanted to go and take the mutilated body of Udayakumara, put it on her lap, and weep, as he was her husband in her previous birth, and had won her heart even in this. But, as she was going towards his corpse, the statue said to her "Don't approach him, Manimekalai. He was your husband not only in your previous birth but also in several births before. But, you have now put your foot on the path which leads to *Nirvana*, and to salvation from births and deaths. So, desist from these exhibitions of human passion."

She asked the statue "Are you the god who knows all truths?"

"Yes. I am Tuvadikan, the god of this statue, and I know everything" said the statue.

"Tell me, then, what *Karma* made my husband die by snake bite in his last birth, and by the

sword of Kanchana in this birth" asked Manimekalai.

"At your camp on the Kayamkarai river, he and you invited the sage, Brahmadharma, for breakfast. Your cook was rather late in getting the breakfast ready and kept the sage waiting. Your husband was very angry with him for it. The poor cook, finally, came with the breakfast boiling hot, but, at the sight of the angry face of your husband, got nervous, and slipped and fell down, dropping all the dishes, and spilling the contents. In a rage, your husband took his sword and cut the cook in two. His death by snake-bite was the punishment for his anger, and his death at the hands of Kanchana is the punishment for his cruel hacking of the cook."

Manimekalai shed tears for the fate of Udayakumara, and asked the god of the statue about her own future. The god said: "You will be thrown into prison by the king and released at the instance of the queen. Then, escaping from terrible dangers, you will go, to Savakanadu, meet Aputra, born there as Punyaraja, take him to Manipallavam and make him remember his former birth. Then he will return to his country. You will be foretold about the destruction of Puhar. You will then go to Vanji and worship at your mother's temple and then learn from various teachers the truth about their creeds and dogmas, assuming the form of an old hermit. You will hear there, from Kovalan's

father, about, the destruction of Puhar by a tidal wave, and of the flight of your mother, Sutamati, and Aravana Adigal to Kanchi, and will hear also about a terrible famine at Kanchi. You will therefore, go to Kanchi with your begging bowl and relieve suffering there. Then, you will be instructed about *Dharma** and *Tapas*† and the true meaning and purpose of life by Aravana Adigal. You will then become an ascetic for good, and set your feet firmly on the road shown by the Buddha to salvation. After several rebirths, all in Magadha, and all as a male, you will finally attain Nirvana."‡

SAGES TELL THE KING.

Manimekalai heard all this, and becalmed her mind. The morning broke. Early visitors to the temple of the goddess Champapati found the prince's body lying there, cut in two. They were horrified, and went and told the holy hermits of Chakravalakottam. The hermits went and questioned Manimekalai. She told them all that she knew. The holy ones went and told the king about the occurrence, and cited many similar instances in the past when guilty love-making, like Udayakumara's, had led to death. "Kakandan, had been put on the throne, as he was but a concubine's son of Kantan, the Chola King, and not a Kshatriya,

* The eternal law of Righteousness.

† Penance for the benefit of all beings.

‡ Salvation.

and would not, therefore, he killed by Parasurama who had vowed to kill all Kshatriya kings. His second son made overtures to Marudi, a Brahman woman, on her return from a bath in the Kaveri
She went at once to the guardian deity of the cit
and asked it why she, a chaste woman, who coul
force the clouds to bring down rains according t
the sage of Truth,* had excited such passion in
stranger. The deity told her that it was becaus
though she was faithful to her husband, she wa
fond of witnessing lewd dances and listening t
immoral tales. It assured her that the king woul
punish the prince in seven days. As it predicte
the king had the prince beheaded within that peri
for his misbehavior. As if to test the king, the fir
son too misbehaved. He wanted to make a chas
maiden, Visakai, his mistress by putting on her
garland from his neck. The king had him also b
headed, though he was his heir and only remainin
son. Oh king, out of the five deadly sins, murde
theft, drink and lying can be, with a great effo
brought under control. The fifth, lust or desi
requires the supremest effort of all, and it has bee
for that reason, laid down that a sage should co
quer lust or desire as a condition precedent."

The king said to the sages: "Born in the sola
line of the king‡ who gave the judgment that his

* Tiruvalluvar He says so in verse 55 of his immortal work, "The Kural."

† The Cholas claimed to belong to the Solar Dynasty.

‡ Manunitikandacholan. The son was eventually saved by the intervention of God just before the execution.

son, who rashly rode over a calf and killed it, should be ridden over and killed in similar fashion, on the mother cow's pulling the Bell of Justice, I do not grieve over my son's fate. I only feel sorry that it was left to Kanchana, and not to me, to mete out the punishment to him." He then had Manimekalai taken into protective custody and kept in prison to save her from the fury of the mob and of Udayakumara's friends and sympathisers.

THE QUEEN'S MACHINATIONS.

The Queen, Siritti, was extremely grieved to hear about her son's death. Her wrath against Manimekalai, whom she considered to be a mere public woman, for having indirectly brought it about, by withholding her favours from him, and by assuming Kayasandikai's form, knew no bounds. On the advice of Vasantavvai, her confidante, she concealed her grief and and anger and pleaded with the king that Manimekalai should not be kept in prison, as she had done nothing wrong, and that she should be allowed to keep her safely in a room in her own quarters.

"Certainly" said the king. "I only want her safety to be ensured."

The Queen accordingly kept her in a room in her quarters. She fumigated the room with the poison gas got from *dhatura** seeds, in order to bring

* The thorn-apple. Eating the seeds is said to be sure to bring about madness.

about madness. But the goddess Manimekalai interfered and neutralised the effect completely. Then the queen sent a wild young man, strong as a bull, lustful as a hare, into Manimekalai's room, one night, in order to ravish her, in revenge for her refusal of her favours to Udayakumara. He rushed in eagerly, but went out even more precipitately, as he found only a gigantic and ferocious man, jet black in colour, with red rolling eyes, and teeth like the tusks of a wild boar, inside the room, instead of the charming maiden he had expected, and hankered after. He did not know, of course, that Manimekalai had changed her form like that with the aid of the goddess's *mantra*. As soon as he got out of the place, he fled from the Chola country, so that he might not be ordered again to face such dangers.

The Queen was chagrined at finding Manimekalai, who had resumed her form, uninjured and the wild young man gone. Under the pretext that Manimekalai was ill, she had her shut up in a room with a floor of iron plates which she got heated from below in order to kill her. But this too had no effect.

THE QUEEN REPENTS.

She was now convinced that Manimekalai was being protected by divine beings. So, she went to her, confessed everything, and begged her pardon, saying "I did all that because of my love for my son, and anger at his death which was indirectly due to you."

"You are a deluded woman" said Manimekalai. "Did you love his body or his soul? If you loved his body, why did you allow it to be burnt? If you loved his soul, why did you not know about his previous birth, and weep for him when he died of snake-bite as my husband Rahula?"

"Your husband!" said the Queen.

Manimekalai then told her the whole story of their previous births and said "If you loved his soul, you would have seen it in every living thing in the world and loved all beings, for the soul, oh queen, is only one, the bodies alone being different. Anger, oh queen, is a great enemy. So is lust. Listen. Once, an artisan's wife was beaten mercilessly by her husband who unjustly suspected her of unchastity, and drove her out of his house, into the streets, keeping her son, a boy of three, with him. Angered by this, she went to a distant town and lived as a prostitute, hiring her body out to every person who paid the price. Years passed, and she became rich, and lived in a big mansion. One day, her son, who was now a tall young man, went to her, and knew her. Then, because of some special fascination for the young man, she asked him his name and residence, and discovered, to her horror, that he was her son. She shrieked, like one mad, and told him the horrible truth. He jumped from the terrace of her house and died. She rushed to the backyard, jumped into the deep well there, and put an end to her life. Such is the effect of lust and anger, oh queen."

The queen prostrated before Manimekalai for enlightening her in such high spiritual truths. Manimekalai prostrated before the queen, and said "You are in the position of a mother-in-law to me, and should not prostrate before me. You are also the queen, and should not prostrate before a subject like me." The queen embraced her, and shed tears of repentance for the evil things that she had contemplated for her.

Chitrapati Rebuffed.

Chitrapati heard of Manimekalai's imprisonment, and resolved to beg of the Queen to release her in order that she might become the head of the 121 palace dancing girls after her. She went to the Queen and made the request. The Queen said to her "She will not go to you, or enter your house. Your life involves the taking of liquor, the uttering of lies, the indulgence in promiscuous love, the killing of animals, and preoccupation with filty thoughts. So, go away." Chitrapati did not even dare to appeal to Manimekalai, whose very attitude showed her entire concurrence with the sentiments expressed by the Queen. So, she slunk away, disappointed.

Aravana Adigal's Promise.

Madhavi was desolate with grief at hearing that Manimekalai was in protective custody. After consulting Sutamati, she went and fell at the feet of Aravana Adigal, and, taking that holy man

with her, went to the Queen. The Queen received the sage with great honour and readily agreed to let Manimekalai go where she liked. Aravana Adigal explained to the Queen, at her request, the elements of Buddhist *dharma*. He told Manimekalai that he would teach her more of it after she had learnt the fundamental doctrines of other creeds and sects.

MANIMEKALAI GOES TO SAVAKANADU.

Manimekalai asked all those present to remember the truths taught by Aravana Adigal. Then she said to that sage: "If I remain here, I shall not be happy. People will regard me as the woman who caused their prince's death. And, I shall be perpetually reminded of that painful tragedy of errors on that unforgettable day. So, I shall go to Savakanadu, the country where Aputra, reborn as Punyaraja, is ruling now, take him to Manipallavam, and make him remember his past birth, as Aputra, before the Buddha seat, and then go to Vanji, do charity, worship at the temple of my mother Kannaki, and learn the tenets of various creeds, and then come to you so that you may teach me fully about the Buddhist *dharma*, as promised by you."

Saying this, she bade them all farewell, and rose into the air, as the sun was setting, and, went to Chakravalakottam, and circumambulated the shrine of Champapati and the god's statue there,

and then flew to Nagapura in Savakanadu where Punyaraja, son of Bhumichandra, was ruling in great prosperity. "His advent marked the end of a twelve years' famine. Ever after he ascended the throne, rains have been regular, and crops bountiful" said a citizen, in reply to Manimekalai's query, on her landing there in a grove of flowering trees. Manimekalai attended a discourse by Dharma Sravaka, a sage, in that grove. Punyaraja was also present there. He was struck by Manimekalai's beauty, and by the begging bowl in her hand, and enquired of his followers who she was. His chambertain told him that she was the famous maiden Manimekalai whom he had seen at Puhar. He added "In the whole of Jambudvipa, there is no one to match her in beauty, piety and charity."

"Oh King, you have forgottten that this begging bowl was yours in your previous birth as Aputra who was abandoned by Sali and was saved by a cow" said Manimekalai.

"You know about my previous birth?" said Punyaraja, surprised. "Tell me all about it."

MANIMEKALAI AT MANIPALLAVAM AGAIN.

"Go to Manipallavam, and circumambulate the Buddha seat there thrice" said Manimekalai, "and everything about your past birth will become clear to you. I am going there in advance and hope to meet you there."

With that, Manimekalai rose into the air and flew to Manipallavam. Punyaraja went and told

his mother Amarasundari, about all this. Then he resolved to abdicate and become a monk. But his prime minister, Janamitra, reminded him of his duty to his country, which had recovered from famine only after his ascending the throne, and dissuaded him from the idea.

Entrusting the kingdom to his ministers during his absence, Punyaraja went in a ship to Manipallavam, and met Manimekalai who was already there. After circumambulating the Buddha seat thrice, he remembered the full story of his previous birth. The goddess Tivatilakai appeared before him and Manimekalai, and showed them the place where the corpse of Aputra lay buried in the sand. They dug up the place thoroughly. There were only some bones left. Punyaraja constructed a sacrophagus of white mortar over them. Then he felt the call to remunciation once more, and wanted again to become a monk. Manimekalai dissuaded him, saying "Your duty and your charity lie in seeing that the subjects of your great island, and of the many islands between it and here, are supplied with food, drink, clothing and residence, and well protected internally and externally. So, go back to your kingdom, oh King."

Tivatilakai told Manimekalai that Kaveripattinam had been destroyed by a tidal wave at the orders of the goddess Manimekalai, as the king Vadivelkilli had, in his grief over the supposed death of his son by a Naga princess, Pilivalai, in

the wreck of a ship captained by Kambalasetti, omitted to arrange for and celebrate the annual Indra festival. The goddess told her further that her mother and Sutamati and Aravana Adigal had gone to Vanji after this catastrophe.

SHE GOES TO VANJI.

Sending Punyaraja back to Savakanadu, Manimekalai flew to Vanji. There she went to the temple of her mother, Kannaki, the goddess of chastity, and worshipped Kannaki and also the image of Kovalan there. Kannaki told her that it was Kovalan's *karma*☩ in his previous birth that was responsible for his cruel and unjust execution, and that her burning the city of Madura was, therefore, not quite a just act. She advised Manimekalai to assume the form of an old hermit and learn the doctrines of the various non-Buddhist sects and creeds.

SHE LEARNS THE TRUTHS OF VARIOUS SECTS.

Manimekalai did so and visited the innumerable, halls, *asrams** and *Mutts*† of the various Non-Buddhist sects and learnt their principal doctrines, and varying theories of knowledge, from the ‡*Vai-*

☩ See my "Kovalan and Kannaki" for this story.

* Hermitages of sages

† Monasteries of learned monks.

‡ Those who rely on the Vedas alone as representing all Truth and Knowledge.

dikavadins, the *Brahmavadins,* § the *Vaishnavavadins* or the *Narayaniyas,* $ the *Saivavadins,* ¶ the *Sankhyas,*** the *yogins,*†† the *Vaiseshikas,* ‡‡ the *Ajivakas,*§§ the *Nirgranthas*$$ and the *Bhutavadins* or *Lokayatas* or *Sunyavadins.* ¶¶ She was not satisfied with any of their systems and went to the Buddhist *Vihara** in search of Aravana Adigal. There she met Kovalan's father who told her that his eighth ancestor, the man saved from the sea by the goddess Manimekalai, had constructed that beautiful *Vihara* with many stories. He told her also that Aravana Adigal, Madhavi and Sutamati had left for Kanchi where a great famine was rag-

§ Those who rely also on the **Upanishads,** and on ths conception of Brahman, the One Supreme Spirit. Immanent, Transcendent and Emergent, mentioned in them.

$ Those who regard the Supreme Spirit as Vishnu or Narayana lying in his cosmic sleep or **yoganidra** on the Milky Way.

¶ Those who regard the Supreme Spirit as Siva who creates and destroys everything in his **Kreeda** or **Leela** (Sport), and is the shepherd **(Pati)** freeing men-**(Pasu)** from the bondage **(Pasam)** of births and deaths.

** Those who regard the whole universe as consisting of **Mulaprakriti** (Primeval Nature) and a number of **Purushas** (spirits), and are really atheistic.

†† Those who recognise God as a great **Purusha** who helps men on to salvation.

‡‡ Those who recognise six elements whose permutations and combinations constitute the Universe.

§§ Those who believe in God and Fate and Pre-Destination.

$$ Jains, who believe in **Karma** as the great Truth.

¶¶ Materialists who believe in Matter alone.

* Buildings where Buddhist monks assemble and discuss.

ing. He asked her also to go there at once and relieve the suffering by means of her begging bowl.

MANIMEKALAI FLIES TO KANCHI.

Manimekalai bowed to him and flew to Kanchi. She found that beautiful city in the grip of a terrible famine. The king and his assemblies of ministers were very glad at her arrival. The king told her that a goddess had apprised him of it. Manimekalai had a Buddha seat, and temples for the goddesses Manimekalai and Tivatilakai, erected in that grove. Then she began feeding the thousands of hungry people who flocked to her and were speaking no less than eighteen different languages. Soon, clouds gathered, and the rains came down in torrents. The famine was over.

SHE BECOMES A BUDDHIST ASCETIC FOR GOOD.

Manimekalai was about to go in search of her mother and Sutamati and Aravana Adigal when they themselves went to that grove. She worshipped them with betel and camphor. Then she told Aravana Adigal that she had learnt the essence of the other creeds and sects at Vanji.

"Which of these creeds do you hold to be true?" asked the sage.

"All of them are grand and represent great efforts to find out the truth. But none of them represent the whole truth. Indeed they confuse

and confound the laymen, and create quarrels and misunderstandings.

"So many gods, so many creeds,
So many paths that wind and wind,
While just the art of being kind
Is all this sad world needs"

said she. "Teach me about the Buddha's *Dharma*, as you promised."

Aravana Adigal then explained to her in detail the Four Great Truths of Buddhism, and the twelve *Nidanas* or Hindrances, like Ignorance, Egotism, Anger, Attachment and Desire, and stressed the need for getting rid of births and deaths and attaining *Nirvana*.

She asked him "Will the Buddha save me, sir?" He replied:

"By ourselves is evil done,
By ourselves we pain endure,
By ourselves become we pure,
No one saves us but ourselves,
No one can, and no one may,
We ourselves tread the path,
Buddhas only show the way."

He then explained to her fully the meaning of *Dharma* and *Tapasya** according to the Buddha.

* Penance for the welfare of the whole world.

Manimekalai then assumed the dress of a *tapasi*† and devoted herself, for the rest of her life, to *tapas* in order to get rid of the bondage of births and deaths.

† Ascetic Woman.

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